Menopause in Women With HIV Linked to Greater Fatigue, Muscle Aches

As the HIV population ages, such health outcomes require greater focus.

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Women living with HIV are likely to experience greater fatigue and muscle aches and pains after entering menopause. This finding from a recent survey underlines the importance of focusing on the needs of people with HIV as they live longer thanks to antiretroviral treatment.

Publishing their findings in the journal Menopause, researchers at the Columbia University School of Nursing and the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, including Rebecca Schnall, PhD and Nancy Reame, PhD, conducted a cross-sectional survey of 1,342 people with HIV, including 957 men and 385 women, regarding their symptoms related to the virus. Then the study authors conducted a follow-up survey of menstrual bleeding patterns—specifically, those that suggested menopause—among 222 women who participated in the first survey.

“The study of differences in the way men and women experience HIV symptoms is an important emerging focus,” Reame said in a press release. “A number of studies have described menopause symptoms in women with HIV, but few have examined whether menopause might help explain the enhanced severity of HIV symptoms observed in women when compared to men.”

In the first survey, after the study authors adjusted the data to account for various differences between the participants, they found that depression scores were similar between the sexes, but women experienced higher scores for fatigue and muscle aches and pains.

The respondents to the follow-up survey among women were predominantly Black, heterosexual, nonsmokers and obese. The women had been diagnosed with HIV an average of 16 years prior and typically had at least one other health condition.

Compared with the 118 premenopausal women, the 104 women whose periods had stopped due to menopause or a hysterectomy (removal of the uterus) had higher scores for muscle aches and pains, fatigue and difficulty falling asleep. These associations remained after the investigators adjusted the data to account for age, time since HIV diagnosis and the number of HIV-associated non-AIDS health conditions among the women.

“Given the shifting demographics in the HIV epidemic, our findings are very salient for people

living with HIV and their health care providers," Schnall said in the press release. "If health care providers can better predict, identify and manage the symptoms that are most burdensome to women living with HIV, they can improve care for these women."

To read a press release about the study, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

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